



Montessori on the move
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Caledonia takes out Lancers
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Houston County



NEWS

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Serving the greater La Crescent, Hokah and Dakota, Minn., area

\$1

Local girl headed to National Spelling Bee

La Crescent eighth-grader will compete with 280 others from around the country in Washington, D.C.

By **KARI KNUTSON**
Houston County News

Radhika Edpuganti wore her two favorite socks — a monkey sock on her left foot and a smiley face on her right.

"I couldn't decide which to wear," she said.

She considers them lucky, and for good reason. Radhika, 14, wore them to the District 300 Spelling Bee at La Crescent Middle School, which she won. She then advanced to regionals, where she garnered the top spot again, and finally to a state competition March 1 in Rochester, where she came home with a first-place trophy at the Southeast Minnesota Spelling Bee.

"I was hoping to at least have fun and do well," Radhika said. "It came out better, I guess."

The eighth-grader received a 12 1/2-pound dictionary for winning, as well as a ticket to the

Scripps National Spelling Bee June 1-2 in Washington D.C. She's one of only five Minnesota students and 280 across the nation who will compete.

"I really don't know what to expect," Radhika said. "I'm excited and nervous at the same time."

Her winning word at the state competition was "digitalis." She successfully spelled the word after 33 rounds of competition and a first runner-up who missed the word "truncheon."

Vasavi, Radhika's mother, sat nervously in the crowd. She has been working almost every day with Radhika on spelling.

"Did she say it right?" Vasavi remembers thinking.

Radhika remained focused.

"I was waiting for the next word to come," Radhika said. "Then all of a sudden it hit me."

She was unsure of a few of the words she was asked to spell. She almost spelled "bequeath"

wrong. She wrote the word down on paper incorrectly, but then realized it didn't look right and corrected her error.

Before she won, Vasavi tried to reassure her daughter, letting her know that if she won, it meant more spelling. If she lost, that meant more time for a little leisure.

"I'm going to have to get a little more serious now," Radhika said.

Radhika will leave May 29 with her mom and her dad, Mani, to compete in the spelling bee. Competition starts with a written round with 280 students competing for more than \$30,000 in cash and prizes. If she does well enough, she'll be among the spellers broadcast on ESPN. The finals are shown on ABC.

Radhika has come a long way from years ago when her mother

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KARI KNUTSON/HOUSTON COUNTY NEWS

La Crescent Middle School eighth-grader Radhika Edpuganti won the southeast Minnesota Spelling Bee on March 1 and is moving on to the Scripps National Spelling Bee June 3 in Washington, D.C. She's one of five representatives from Minnesota and 280 nationwide who will compete.

Messiah moves home



RYAN HENRY/HOUSTON COUNTY NEWS

Messiah Lutheran Church members approach the altar to receive communion during the church's first service in its new building on Sunday. It features a 40-by-70-foot narthex, space for fellowship and food warming, and a pastor's office that doubles as a Sunday school room. Expansion is possible — and planned — sometime in the future, but right now, parishioners are simply happy to be in.

Parishioners of Messiah Lutheran Church moved into their brand new church on Sunday, five months after construction began and 17 years after the congregation organized in La Crescent.

By **RYAN HENRY**
Houston County News

A verse from the Gospel reading at Messiah Lutheran Church on Sunday fit the occasion well. "And Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good that we are here.' Indeed it is.

After years of planning and five months of construction, parishioners at the small Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod congregation moved into their new church home on the corner of North Ninth Street and Jonathan Lane in La Crescent. Sunday was their first service in the new, \$200,000 church and the first in their own building, as they've most recently met in the band room at La Crescent High School and before that

at the former Knights of Columbus building.

"It's great," said Pastor Matt Lorfeld. "It's a sense of having a home finally for the congregation."

Ground for the church was broken on Sept. 29 on the six acres of land the church has owned for the past 10 years. Since then, construction crews have worked through the winter to complete the building, which will snugly accommodate about 100 people.

The anticipation level was high, building to the week of the first service. That includes for Lorfeld, because he'll be able to move his office out of his basement and into the church's office, which will double as a Sunday school room for now.

"Everyone wants to be in last month," he said. "They've been having various things stored in basements and closets, and of course they're all finally looking to make room in their basements and closets and bringing everything here."

Entering the church, the first — largest — room is 40-by-70-foot narthex where worship takes place. An altar, sacristy and storage space are at the head of the room, along with a large wooden cross and baptismal font that were made by a parishioner. Several rows of chairs face the altar but can be moved for fellowship after services. The plan is to, in the future, buy padded seats that more resemble pews, Lorfeld said.

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Hokah police receive \$60k grant

City receives snowshoes that can be checked out at public library

By **CRAIG MOORHEAD**
For the Houston County News

Hokah Police Chief Robert Schuldt told the Hokah City Council at its March 1 meeting that his department has been awarded a Community Oriented Policing Services grant for \$60,000. COPS grants are administered through the U.S. Department of Justice.

Schuldt said the technology equipment grant his department will receive is the result of an application City Administrator Rodney Blank helped him put together. The money can be used for a wide range of equipment, including video cameras, computers and other items.

Schuldt also reminded attendees that city pet licenses are due in April.

New policy for bills

The council acted on Blank's recommendation to establish a policy for residents to address unusual water and sewer bills. Under the plan, if a resident has a high bill due to a bona fide leak, Blank will be allowed to adjust it. The water charge will be billed at full rate, but the sewer charge for the month will be set at the average for the previous three months.

Council members have had to address numerous water and sewer adjustments due to leaks, so the new policy is intended to alleviate some of those issues.

MnDOT resolution

Members voted to enter into an agreement with the Minnesota Department of Transportation, joining its "community roadside landscaping partnership program."

MnDOT will provide approximately \$8,000 toward plantings along Minnesota Highway 16/44. The city of Hokah will determine where the items

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KARI KNUTSON/HOUSTON COUNTY NEWS

Radhika Edpuganti practices spelling words with her mother Vasavi at her home Monday afternoon. Radhika studies spelling at least 10 hours a week, in addition to her other school work and activities. Her reward, Radhika says, after coming home from school and doing her homework is being quizzed on words by her mother.

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called her in to watch the spelling bee on TV.

"I was fascinated by how they could spell," Radhika said. "They all seemed connected to each other. It seemed like they were having fun, but competing."

Years before, she'd seen the movie "Akeelah and the Bee," about another young woman competing in a spelling bee.

"Does this girl get stung by a bee?" Radhika remembers asking before seeing it.

She has competed before, but in nothing quite like this. She knows she'll be surrounded by stellar spellers and she's ready to work even harder.

Radhika studies spelling at least 10 hours a week. She also is involved in track, violin, year-book, Lego League, La Crosse Youth Symphony Orchestra and dance.

After school, she comes home, eats and does homework.

Her reward — having her mom quiz her on words. A pile of words, along with definitions, sits on a kitchen counter. Some are highlighted, indicating she still needs to work on them.

She's also attempting to go through her prize-winning dictionary to prepare, all the way from "a" to zyzzogeton (meaning a large genus of South American leafhoppers).

Knowing the definitions of words helps her figure them out.

"My school subjects help me more than anything else," Radhika said.

Mom agrees.

"I think in eighth grade, it's easier," Vasavi said. "In sixth grade, it's more memorizing."

Coming back to school after her victory was pretty sweet for Radhika.

"My friends were all over me," she said. "I saw I had a lot of support."

La Crescent Middle School Principal Ben Barton is among her supporters. He said he's thrilled to see all of Radhika's hard work paying off.

"She's really committed at pretty much everything she sets her mind to, this included," Barton said. "She's an awesome kid."

Barton said no other La Crescent student has reached nationals.

"I wouldn't put it past her to win the whole thing," Barton said. "She really could."

Radhika isn't so sure, but she's going to give it her best shot. One of the things she's looking forward to is meeting other kids who enjoy spelling as much as she does.

"It's like going to a totally different school, but you're all there for the same reason," Radhika said. "I just want to have fun."

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will be planted. Council members noted that some local businesses do not want to have plantings between them and the highway, so local control is important.

Another DOT program also was discussed after Public Works Director Andy Klingsporn and several other city officials attended a seminar in Rochester on the MnDOT Municipal Agreement Solicitation Program. MnDOT's 11-county District 6 will have \$1.5 million in funding for the program in 2014 and 2015. The 2014 application is due by July 1.

Klingsporn noted that improvements for items such as sidewalks and lighting along Hwy. 16/44 could qualify, but the amount of local matching dollars the program would require is still unknown. He offered to meet with planning commission members to brainstorm on the subject.

SHIP snowshoes

Council member Samantha Mullen reported that the city has received 35 pairs of snowshoes with poles through a Statewide Health Improvement Program grant. They will be available to check out from the library and also will be used by St. Peter's

Catholic School and Bluff Country Learning Options, Mullen said.

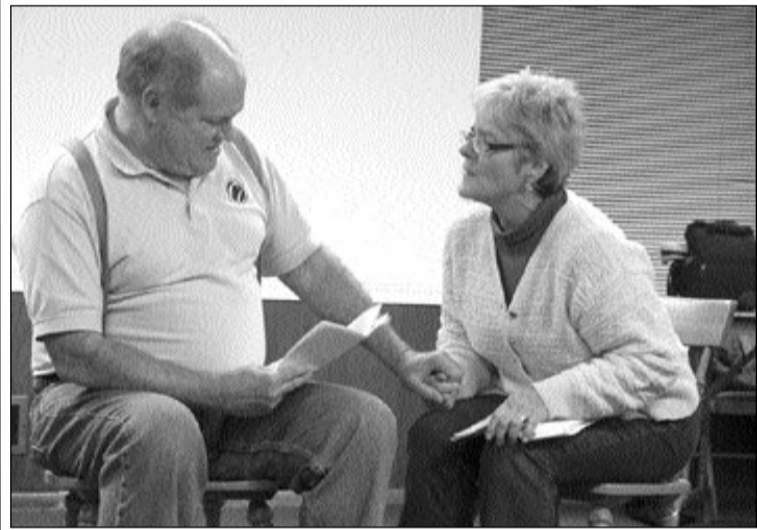
Mosquito control?

The council approved an annual arboviral control program invoice submitted by Dave Geske, whose staff checks for and monitors mosquito and tick-borne disease vectors in Houston and La Crosse counties. Hokah's bill for 2010 came to \$371.

Blank noted that additional mosquito control measures might be available to the city, and offered to get an estimate before next month's council meeting. Council members expressed interest in the plan, especially for areas plagued by the insects, such as the Hokah Legion Ball Field.

Cell phone tower

Hokah City Engineer James Kochie reported that a contract agreement between the city and Verizon Communications was still being reviewed by City Attorney William Von Arx. Kochie said Von Arx had discussed several concerns with him, including property taxes on the structure. The contract will be sent back to Verizon with some questions for discussion, he said.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Actors Rick Nance and Margaret Nelson rehearse LSP's one-act play, "Look Who's Knockin'," which will be performed in Houston at on March 17.

Messiah | Continued from front page



RYAN HENRY/HOUSTON COUNTY NEWS

The new Messiah Lutheran Church building sits at the corner of North Ninth Street and Jonathan Lane in La Crescent on land the church purchased 10 years ago in the hopes of someday having a building of its own. The church previously met at La Crescent High School and the former Knights of Columbus building.

"For now, we'll be using chairs so we can configure the room how we'd like to use it," he said.

The church also features a warming area where food is gathered for pot lucks or other celebrations, though it doesn't have the equipment to prepare food. Finishing work also needs to take place, both in the warming area and on the exterior of the building, where Lorfeld said the church plans to add new signage and a cross. It also plans to pave its parking lot.

The new building will allow the church to serve its members more fully, especially in the area of worship. Now it can hold special services aside from those on Sundays, such as Christmas. At the high school, it was sometimes difficult to ask a custodian to come in on Christmas Day to open the building for the church, so services weren't held.

"At least now, we won't have to worry about if we want to pay the rent and the janitor, and also asking him to come in on Christmas," Lorfeld said. "If we want to start a mid-week service for those who can't come on Sunday, that's something we can look into and see what interest is there in that way."

It'll also help serve the com-

munity better, he added. The church hopes to host community events on its property, such as a spring community festival or meals. It's already been home to the La Crescent Community Garden.

"I think now we'll be able to do a lot more outreach-oriented things, being able to engage the community and see what the needs are," he said. "That's now our next step. Get out into the community and find out. Now that we have this space available, what are some needs in the community that can be addressed?"

And he's hoping people are drawn to the church and new members register, though he points out he doesn't measure success by the number of people who attend.

"At the same time, it's always a desire that the church can grow," he said. "We're definitely a welcoming group of people."

But for now, it's a significant step that's to be celebrated by the people who helped build the church. It signifies both perseverance and permanence of the congregation, Lorfeld said.

"It's definitely that permanence, as far as having that location of our own," he said, "and definitely perseverance for a

congregation that's been around 17 years or so. They've really stuck it out, and now the community itself can kind of see that this wasn't just a passing fad of yet another Lutheran church.

"We're setting our roots down and hopefully able to be a positive impact, as well. That's really something I hope we keep in mind, that now that we have a building, our eyes aren't fixed within these walls, but rather looking out to see the community we're in and the people in our everyday lives."

On Sunday, about 60 people showed up for the first service and members of the building committee were thanked publicly for their work. After worship, people mingled in back, snacked, drank coffee and admired their new church.

For Ruth Proksch, it was a prayer answered. She asked that one day, Messiah could have its own church, coincidentally on the very spot it was built.

"I remember talking to the Lord out under an apple tree one time," she said. "I only hoped and prayed that one day we could have a church here, and here it's a reality."

And she couldn't have asked for a better end product.

"We thoroughly love it," said Proksch, a member of the building committee. "It's a mission that has finally made it. It's been a long time, but it's been worth the wait."

Building committee member Diane Krueger agreed.

"I think it's beautiful," she said. "It has the right atmosphere for worship and it's a nice size for fellowship. It's all come together just like we wanted it to."

She said the church's completion is not only nice for the congregation, but for the community. Now when she tells someone she attends Messiah, they know where it is.

"When we go to someone and say, 'Would you like to come visit our church,' they have a presence to recognize," Krueger said. "That's what's probably more important to me than anything else."

Lorfeld said Messiah is a dedicated congregation, and this process has shown their commitment to the church and in making the community a better place.

"It's been a great thing to see the congregation come together. New members and long-time members have gotten the chance to get to know one another as they're putting in some sweat equity," he said.

Nearly all the men in the church did some physical labor, and if they couldn't, they were cheering the others on, Lorfeld said. The women always brought the food.

"It was everyone using the various gifts they have," he said.

Though Lorfeld accomplished getting a church built in just his first calling out of seminary, he takes little credit for it.

"It has been (an accomplishment), but really it has been an accomplishment by my own weakness," he said. "I've been impressed time and again with the people of this congregation. They made this happen."

Land Stewardship play coming to Houston

The Land Stewardship Project will present the one-act play "Look Who's Knockin'" at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 17 at Cross of Christ Lutheran Church in Houston. The play centers on a retiring farm couple's decision on what to do with their land. Following the play will be an audience discussion.

The show features the dilemma facing conservation farmers Nettie and Gerald. They must decide if they should sell their land for the highest price to an industrial farmer who could remove the farm's soil conservation practices, or help out a young couple interested in starting a dairy farm.

For more information, contact the Land Stewardship Project's Lewiston office at (507) 523-3366 or e-mail dnopar@landstewardshipproject.org.



Remember when...

The Ranch Motel, located at 200 S. Chestnut St., La Crescent, was removed in mid-2000s to make way for the new replacement bridge near the stoplight intersection of La Crescent — and all its highway improvements of Hwys. 14/16/61. The property was originally purchased in the 1940s by Al Moore when it was a filling station. Moore turned it into a root beer stand, then a restaurant, and in 1950 into the Ranch Motel. By the time of its removal, the land and building was owned by Kevin Collins, grandson of Al Moore, who had purchased it in 1988 from his mother, Colleen Collins.

What Do You Think?

Write a letter to the editor!
250 words or less